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SUBJECT: EX-PRESIDENT CHISSANO AND FORMER AFRICAN LEADERS
LAUNCH FORUM

REF: A. 05 MAPUTO 463

[1](#)B. 05 MAPUTO 255

[1](#)1. On January 11 former Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano welcomed 15 other former African leaders to Maputo for the inaugural meeting of the "Forum of Former African Heads of State and Government." The Forum is Chissano's brainchild and was organized by the Joaquim Chissano Foundation, which he created shortly after leaving office in February 2005 (ref B). Among the notable former presidents in attendance were Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, Pierre Buyoya of Burundi, Nicéphore Soglo of Benin, and Bakili Muluzi of Malawi. Members also include certain Africans who have headed African international organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity and African Development Bank. Membership, currently at 24, reportedly will be open to retired African leaders who support the values of democracy, peace, stability and development. Chissano is the Forum's president, Soglo its vice president, and Mandela its patron. The Forum will be headquartered in South Africa, with a secretariat temporarily at the Africa Institute of South Africa.

[1](#)2. Mozambican President Armando Guebuza spoke at the opening ceremony, along with Chissano and Mandela. In his remarks Chissano said the forum would operate as a consultative body and platform for the exchange of ideas aimed at advancing the development of the continent, in keeping with the objectives of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Mandela characterized former leaders as key resources for conflict resolution, and for lobbying wealthy nations and international investors to funnel more resources in to Africa. He stressed that the forum must not be seen as an attempt by past leaders to "rule from the grave," but rather a means to share with policymakers their wealth of knowledge and experience.

[1](#)3. One key objective of the Forum will be to contribute to developing and maintaining a positive image of Africa in the international arena, Chissano told the audience. (Note: In April 2005 Chissano publicly criticized U.S. media coverage of Africa for, in his opinion, its focus on negative news, saying that this harmed the flow of investment and, in some cases, assistance to the continent. Chissano cited a study conducted by former U.S. Ambassador Charles Stith that examined the coverage of Africa in five prominent U.S. publications between 1994 and 2004. See Ref A. Chissano participated in a meeting of former African heads of state organized by Ambassador Stith last year, and his remarks suggested that this or similar meetings gave him the idea for the Forum. End Note.)

¶4. Comment: Chissano recently played a significant role in helping ease tensions surrounding the 2005 elections in Guinea-Bissau as an envoy of UNSYG Anan. He chaired the AU in 2003-04 and led Mozambique into the 1992 peace agreement that ended the country's 16-year civil war. Mandela, Kaunda and Rawlings bring the Forum considerable prestige and experience. However, despite the speeches, it is not clear exactly what the group will do. Although Mandela wished other members good luck in his address, the elderly statesman's remarks suggested that he probably will not participate actively himself. End Comment.
La Lime